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AUTHOR Blum, Marian
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ABSTRACT

Center-based day care, at its current level of funding, is meeting neither adult nor child needs. Parents, especially working mothers, need child care that is reliable, flexible, professional, and affordable, but day care is rarely flexible, has few accommodations for emergencies, and is often not satisfactory for the maximum development of children. In addition, parents may pay as much as 20 percent of their income for such services. Day care teachers need jobs with adequate salaries, decent hours, vacations and fringe benefits, pleasant and healthy working conditions, career ladders, and respect from their clients and from society in general. They get almost none of these things. Children have many personal, interpersonal, and educational-developmental needs. Few day care centers, minimally funded as they presently are, can meet children's needs. Problems, especially health problems and the problem of dehumanization, are most severe among younger children attending centers with the longest hours of operation. Although psychological studies indicate few negative effects of day care on participating children, methodological problems cast doubt on such findings. To alleviate some of the problems of day care, parents must stop the pattern of exploiting day care workers, and in addition, society must acknowledge the importance of child care and encourage men as well as women to raise the next generation. (RH)

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Contemporary Day Care: Does it Meet Either Educational or Family Needs?

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Marian Blum
Educational Director
Wellesley College Child Study Center
Wellesley, MA 02181

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Contemporary Day Care: Does it Meet Either Educational or Family Needs?

This paper looks at day care and family issues. But it looks at more than that. It looks at day care in terms of human needs, in terms of how we as a society treat families and children and child care workers. It looks at day care in terms of large social and cultural trends in contemporary society. It should not be a threat to day care, but rather a boost, for good ideas and good institutions can only be strengthened by free speech and open debate.

Day care serves three constituencies: children, parents, and day care workers. In that case, what needs, whose needs take priority? Are children's needs in conflict with the needs of adults? Can we satisfy adult needs without depriving children of their fundamental rights? Does day care meet children's educational needs?

This paper focuses on center-based care, full-time, all-day, up to 40 or 50 hours a week of group living. It does not deal with part-time nursery schools, or play groups, or family day care, all of which I believe are less institutional than center-based care.

Let us first address the issue of adult needs. And that is certainly not a simple issue. For if we are concerned with two groups of adults - parents and day-care workers- a close look proves that the needs of each of these groups are in conflict. Parents, especially working parents, and especially working mothers, need a great deal. (I must stress that by working parents I do mean working mothers, because it has been found in study after study that, regardless of any relevant factors - such as age, socio-economic status, educational level, professional accomplishment, political leaning, career ambition - regardless of any of these factors,

women have been and still are the primary caretakers of children in our society. What are the needs of those working mothers who seek full-time, center-based care for their children?

They need care that is reliable, flexible and professional. They need day-care personnel who understand them, their life-styles, their goals, their child-rearing values, and, above all, who understand and nurture their children. They need sick-child care and sometimes emergency evening and week-end care. They need all of those things in a day care center and they need that center to be affordable. Unfortunately, there are few centers that fulfill those needs. Instead, working parents must spend a large amount, often 20%, of their income on child care. What they do get is rarely flexible, has few accommodations for emergencies, and is often not satisfactory for the maximum development of children.

In addition, parents need employers who are flexible, tolerant, understanding; who know that babies get sick and that preschoolers need mom a little longer some mornings or that second graders put on school plays at ten in the morning and want a parent to attend! Some parents want employers to provide on-site, subsidized, or even free child care for infants and preschoolers as well as after school and vacation care for school-aged children. This is quite ironic, because such provisions - of free or heavily subsidized child care - place parents, but especially mothers, in a dependent position, a position of a subordinate person relying on a dominant person or institution. This is similar to the position Jean Baker Miller describes in Toward a New Psychology of Women, a position women have been struggling to change for tha past twenty years.

But we need not worry too much about that problem. For according to a recent New York Times, there are under one thousand employer sponsored day care centers in the United States, including those sponsored by the military. Until and unless there is a labor shortage, we are not likely to see a huge surge of employer sponsored day care. In fact, many progressive, concerned employers are showing their interest in child care by providing information and referral services. Often all that means is that someone in the personnel department keeps lists of convenient child care facilities and may be available to counsel parents on the merits and costs of different kinds of care. That's a worthwhile service, but it hardly meets the real needs.

In actuality, what most mothers get from their employers is a three-week maternity leave-of-absence and then back-to-work as usual. This trend toward back-to work as soon as possible is not always easy on parents. Having a child necessitates many psychological, physical, emotional and social changes. But our society asks young families to have their children and then to resume all previous activities. Some obstetricians have suggested that this pattern of having a baby and almost immediately going back to work has caused a "preoccupation with the event", a preoccupation among many young parents with the actual birth of the child. The birth, instead of being an important stage between pregnancy and parenthood, becomes the major focus of emotions, energies, excitement, planning. The new baby becomes secondary.

Because there is so little in the way of adequate maternity leave, almost nothing in the way of paternity leave, and because young people are expected to do it all, what we tend to see is not the two-career family, but the three-career family.

The three-career family includes two paid jobs plus a household and children. This means that both parents - but most often the mother - are always juggling their time, experiencing almost constant fatigue, frequently overloaded circuits. One study found that women were so rushed and under pressure that they were never able to either relax or consider a job properly finished. Another study found that many women were unable to enjoy either their households or their careers. In fact, one of these women found Saturdays - cramped with errands, chores, and "quality" time for her children - a "two-career purgatory". One psychologist has called many young parnts "anhedonic", unable to experience real pleasure. Some psychologists are concerned about how much young parents are missing in terms of watching their children grow. Many mothers do feel they are missing some of the best parts of being a mother: first smile, first step. first tooth. Others are jealous of the child's other relationships. For instance, a recent article in the Ladies Home Journal quoted a young mother in this way: "I always thought the hardest thing would be finding a reliable person to take care of the baby, but the truth is that the hardest thing is getting myself to rely on someone. Deep inside, I have an irrational feeling that nobody - not even my husband - could do as good a job with Kristen as I could. Anyway, I fired my first two sitters for the pickiest rasons. I finally settled on a wonderful woman who is just about flawless, and Kristen adores her. So now I'm jealous."

Another mother in that same article says that her whole life is work and baby. "I'm afraid", she says," that I tend to ignore my husband". Thus, even parents satisfied with their child care solutions report feeling jealous, report being negligent of spouses.

The needs of the single parent are too lengthy for the purposes of this paper. But even non-working mothers in the two parent family have some very important needs. They need an adequate income so that they can live on one person's earnings. Right now, fewer than half the jobs in America pay enough to support a family. Non-working mothers need either children's allowances or generous tax credits so that they do not live in povery. They need the chance to have some "released time" away from constant child-care responsibilities. Most of all, they need to be looked upon by others - by their peers, by their community, even by their own children,- as doing something worthwhile, useful, important. Unfortunately, since the early 1960s and the new feminism, motherhood and child rearing earned a bad name..Our society has given the message that servicing cars or programming computers is more valuable than raising children. A poignant example of that message came to me in a Christmas card from a recent college graduate who is in a PhD program in a hard science at a large university. "I'm volunteering one morning a week in a local preschool that is wonderful fun. The school is held in the basement of a chapel". (Of course. Where else would you find young children if not in a chapel basement?) "It's a real relaxed atmosphere and I like the teachers. I try to keep it hushed up on campus that I'm working in a playschool - don't want to be taken for someone who's not serious about science. But i't ceratinly the highlight of my week."

This message, this attitude, is not at all uncommon among many contemporary young women. There is a taint, an embarrassment, an uneasiness about expressing an interest in children. In fact, Germaine Greer, the radical feminist of the 1960s, author of The Female Eunuch, has written in her new book, Sex and Destiny, that motherhood in contemporary society is a "degraded, lonely occupation". She points out that Western society, profoundly hostile to children, must change and that motherhood must be

reinforced with "rewards and rises in status."

Thus, what people in families need - young women, young men, mothers, fathers - what they <u>really</u> need is the knowledge and the assurance that raising children is important work. There is much truth to a bumper sticker that reads "Every mother is a working mother."

The next group of adults we must discuss are day care teachers. Their needs are quite different from the needs of parents. They need jobs with <u>at least</u> adequate salaries, decent hours, vacations and fringe benefits, pleasant and healthy working condiations, career ladders, and respect from their clients and from the larger society. In reality they get almost none of these things. In a survey in the February 7, 1984 Woman's Day Magazine, conducted jointly with the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, question #70 asks "What is your current occupation?" One possible response is "Service Worker: hairdresser, waitress, day-care worker, health aide." I don't want to undermine the work of waitresses or hairdressers or other service workers. But studies have found that day care workers in the United States are in the 50th percentile for educational level. I am sure that that is higher than those other jobs. Yet they are in the 5th percentile of salaries. I am sure that <u>that</u> is lower than either waitress or hairdresser.

According to the National Day Care Study, conducted in 1977 by Abt Associates, head teachers in day care centers earn half of what teachers in public schools earn. In 1981 dollars, the average center-based day care teacher was earning below the US Department of Labor designated poverty level. And, according to a recent New York Times, across the country zoo keepers earn more than people who care for children.

Many day care teachers receive no fringe benefits: no health insurance, no paid vacations, even no sick leave. Some national day care franchises pay only for the hours worked. On a given day, if there is heavy child absence, the director might not need a teacher to achieve the legal teacher-child ratio, and so the teacher is sent home without earning her hourly wage. How that teacher pays the rent apparently does not concern the stockholders, the franchisors, or even the client parents.

The columnist Art Buchwald once said that one reason why he loved is job was because he din't have to really do any research or hard thinking. Just pick up the newspaper, he said, and look carefully and you can find plenty of humor. I sometimes feel the same way. Except that the following is humorous only because it is ironic. My source is the December, 1983 "Child Care News", a publication of the Boston Association for the Education of Young Children, the Child Care Resource Center, and two other Boston-Cambridge children's service agencies. In it there is a report on the November, 1983 National AEYC conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The report reviewed a workshop on Health and Safety Issues for Child Care Workers and discussed a survey taken of workers in 20 states. Here is what emerged as identifiable health and safety issues for child care worker.

1. Repeated exposure to illness. (All reported this problem)
2. Lack of supportive policies for staff health. (58% reported working when ill because of economic pressure or lack of substitutes. The economic pressire is due, of course, to the no-sick-leave policy of some under-funded centers. 38% of the respondents had no regularly scheduled breaks. 60% reported no isolation area or staff to supervise ill children.)
3. Back and leg strain. (almost half reported this)
4. Stress (96% reported their jobs as somewhat or very stressful)

And here is my favorite:

5. Contact with pesticides. (44% reported problems with roaches, flies,

mice, fleas and other vermin. 50% reported regular spraying of centers with pesticides.

This was a workshop at a national, professional association meeting. In the summary "the point was stressed that making the environment safe for teachers in no way takes away from the children." In other words, these professionals, primarily women, felt guilty expressing concerns for their own health. They want to reassure the public, and I suppose themselves, that they can have these concerns and not deprive children.

Well, that revealing article was on page two of the December Child Care News. On another page, page 7, in that same issue, there is a job section. And this is where Buchwald's theories of humor and irony apply. For there is an ad for a toddler ~~had~~ head teacher, with a bachelor's degree required and nine months toddler experience, to lead a teaching team, to plan, carry out and evaluate a developmental program that is responsive to individual needs, to do parent work. That job, a 12 month job for 7 hours a day, offered a salary of $10,500. Directly below that a human service agency advertised for a secretary/administrator to set up management systems, deal with the public, type 60 words per minute. That job was being offered at $15,500.

Thus, the Child Care News, in a single edition, reinforces what many of us know already. Child care workers are underpaid, overworked, and seemingly embarrassed to speak up about it. Once again we see that people in our society place little value on child-rearing. We do not value it in mothers or in child care providers. And the major reason for that is because it is women's work. If women can do it, then anyone can do it. If women can do

it, then we don't have to pay high salaries. If ~~men~~ women can do it, it can't be so very important!

To return to our original question about the needs of adults, it appears that all adults - parents, fathers, mothers, child-care workers - need an understanding by society, by peers, by employers, by the government, that raising children is important work. It may be hard, boring, frustrating, fatiguing, thankless, repetitive, claustrophobic. But at the same time it can be warm, stimulating, satisfying, joyful, fleeting, challenging, exhilirating. But it is important work. Raising children is a job and a real one. If parents - mothers or fathers - do it, they need suitable recognition by society of the value of their work. If day-care providers or family day care mothers or in home sitters do the child rearing, they too deserve suitable recognition by society and suitable remuneration by clients. They deserve to be valued for making a vital contribution to the community. When society values child-rearing by either parents or child care workers, we will presumably see less abuse, less negligence, less distress in the lives of children.

Let us now turn to the needs of children. All children need safe, nurturing, stimulating, loving, competent care. They need to build trust, reliance on, confidence in, a small number of consistent, significant adults. They need adults who will treat them in developmetally appropriate ways, neither infantalizing them nor pushing them too quickly. They have educational needs that can not be isolated from their other developmental needs, their needs in physical, social, emotional areas.

It is important to note that just a relatively small percentage of preschool children are in center-based care. The figures change with each new census report and interpretation. But if we accept some recent estimates, there are only approximately one and a half to two million children in licensed day care centers. Large percentages of children are in private homes of non-relatives or in family day care or at home with relatives or sitters. But day care centers are what we hear so much about. Political candidates say - often without ever having been in a center - that we need more. Lobbies and pressure groups push for the creation of centers by the federal, state and local governments, by corporations, universities and hospitals.

I am quite convinced that few day care centers, minimally funded as they are at present, can meet children's needs. For human babies are generally born one at a time, quite helpless and in need of a long childhood. Because they are helpless, they need a great deal of individualized care. Raising children in large groups with limited funds is not easy. It has required new methods, often examples of American ingenuity. These methods include harnesses and leashes with one care giver and six children. What happens when one child falls? What happens when one wants to examine an interesting leaf or bug? What happens when you return to the day care center and you begin to remove the harnesses? Do you hold the other five leashes or let go so that the children run around with leather leashes flapping around with them?

Another example of these methods is a molded plastic cot which its manufacturer says "cradles" the child. It also claims "unique, built-in channels under child for aeration and draining of urine". Another method is the four-unit crib, two up and two down, actually a four-unit cage. We must question what message this kind of crib gives to children about

basic trust. When an adult walks into the room of a baby in a crib, the baby usually extends an arm, turns and looks hopefully toward the door. What happens when four (or twelve or sixteen if the unit is used in multiples) look toward the approaching person who, of course, can only pick up one? The four-unit crib should also give pause about the cognitive development of the babies in it. If babies are learning about their world, about cause and effect, about their place in the physical environment, what do they learn when they hear sounds from above or below or next to them and can see nothing? Do they begin to ignore some of the auditory clues we all use about our surroundings?

A final innovation I must mention is the "Spacemaker" cots. The legs of these canvas cots are angled toward the center of the cot so that, the manufacturer boasts, "Thirty children can sleep in the same space now used by twenty-five".

Raising children in large groups with limited funds means that many facilities do try to squeeze 30 children into space originally used by 25. And this is one of the reasons for another major problem with day-care, the health issue. Many doctors call day care centers the cloacas of our society. A cloaca is a common chamber in reptiles, birds and fish for the discharge of all bodily wastes. The major sewer under the city of Rome is called the Cloaca Maxima. Why would physicians call a place for children - often painted in bright, primary colors - a cloaca? One reason is that there are several major illnesses associated with day care. They are:

1. hepatitis A - a form of hepatitis that children, without any major symptoms, pass on to adults, both day care workers and their parents.

2. influenza b. This is a flu which often leads to conjunctivitis and a form of meningitis. It affects both children and adults in day care

3. gastro-intestinal diseases, such as giardiasis and shigellosis, forms of diarrhea which affect both children and adults.

Problems are, naturally, most severe with the youngest children and in centers with the longest hours. But there are problems with all age groups. In fact, the Journal of the American Medical Association had an editorial about a year ago pointing out that day-care infections are becoming an important public health problem. Some epidemics, the author says, are "reminiscent of pre-sanitation days of the 17th century." And the March 9, 1984 issue of the JAMA had a lengthy article on changing childhood diseases , with infants and preschoolers acquiring some infections at an earlier age than previously. The director of Public Health in Minnesota states in that article that "outbreaks of infections in day care centers now constitute the leading cause of all requests for public health services".

There are many causes of these health problems. Remember, children play, eat, sleep, and sometimes toilet in the same room; there is often overcrowding and overheating; overworked staff must often supervise snack and meal preparation and child toileting and hand washing practically all at the same time; there is limited funding for daily custodial help and for major weekly cleaning. Finally, parents, with no alternatives, often send symptomatic, contagious children to ~~plnes~~ places with no space or facilities for sick-child care. This pattern can be reinforced by respected professionals. For instance, Alison Clarke-Stewart, a psychologist at the University of Chicago, a researcher and author, has written a comprehensive book (Harvard University Press), for parents about day care. She says, "children in day care centers get more flu, rashes, colds, and coughs than children at home. But a child's runny nose may be a

price mothers are willing to pay - especially if most of the wiping of that nose is done by the day care staff."

Here is a clear example of needs conflicting - the child with the runny nose may be in need of some restful time in a tranquil setting. The day care teacher does not particularly enjoy wiping noses and certainly does not need exposure to more germs. But the parents need to be at work. Whose needs come first?

Dehumanization and health problems are but two of the major concerns about children in institutional day care. There are emotional and social stresses on young children who have to be in the same setting 8, 9, or 10 hours a day, 50 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, year in and year out. They are in that setting with no real opportunities for privacy, for independent decision making, for unshared possessions, for private day-dreaming, even for an unobserved temper tantrum. The child in day care is never alone. She has witnesses for all her behaviors; she always ahs competition for adult attention. Another concern has to do with the quality of some centers. Valerie Suransky in The Erosion of Childhood (University of Chicago Press) has some poignant descriptions of several bad centers. As the sociologist Brigitte Berger has said, "Even the most dedicated institutional personnel cannot be a substitute for parents, siblings, grandparents and other permanently concerned individuals tied to the family."

It is important to note, however, that most psychological studies of children in day care have found few negative effects. In studies of attachment, children show secure ties to their mothers. In studies of IQ and of social development they seem to be developing in age appropriate ways. However, many child care and psychology "professionals" have some

reservations about the research:

1. Research cannot prove a negative. It can show that it discovers or uncovers no negative effects, but it cannot prove that nothing negative is happening.

2. The research deals with very limited outcome measures, such as IQ and attachment. These measures are artificial and often contrived.

3. We must question what Urie Bronfenbrenner calls the ecological validity. We cannot generalize results found in a laboratory or an observation booth to the home or the school or the neighborhood.

4. Sample selections often do not account for the myriad of differences between the influences on home-reared and center-reared children.

5. As Belsky and Steinberg pointed out in their comprehensive review of all the day care research, most of the ~~work~~ work has been done in high quality settings, not in settings like those Suransky describes. In fact, many of the studies lump nursery schools and day care together. Therefore, some researchers are testing children in part-time programs and are using the results to reassure us about full-time day care.

6. Research implies that children are a product and ~~measurable~~ measurable. We can measure their height and their weight and their degree of attachment to mother. It is important to stop looking at children as products. It is important to look at the actual lived experience, at what it is like for them in the here and now. As the humorist Erma Bombeck has written, "small children - more than any other single group - have had to bear the brunt of changes of the 80s: our mobility, our redefined family structure, changing technology and new attitudes toward everything, including them. Children are no longer a dominant force, an excuse, a reason, a goal, a status or a commitment. They are just there."

It is clear that center-based care, at its current level of funding, is not meeting either adult needs or child needs. Parents must stop emphasizing the costs of child care. They must stop looking for bargains. They must think about what they spend on their cars, on movies, even on a jar of peanut butter, and realize that child care - if it is to be safe, good, professional, high quality care - will probably be expensive. Parents must stop a pattern of exploiting day care workers, of expecting them in effect to subsidize child care.

But society too must change. Society must acknowledge the importance of child care and encourage men as well as women to raise the next generation. Work patterns must be more flexible so that parents can derive joy and pleasure from both their careers and their families. We must insist on a social, economic and cultural climate that allows families to thrive. We must rethink the length of the work day and of the work week. We already have large numbers of "entitlement" programs - social security, medicare, veterans benefits - programs of aid that are not based on individual needs but on society's needs. Why not a family support system to <u>reward</u> those who raise the children? Above all, children have to be cared for. It appears that many children today are not being cared for. What seems to be happening in much of our society is the "no-parent" family. Some parents are preoccupied with the event of birth, but then seem unable or unwilling to carry out the responsibilities of raising children. Many treat their children as things - another acquisition along with the color tv and the push-button phone. They turn their children over to other people - at not too high a cost - to raise, to nurture. The child becomes like the "hot potato": Here, you take it. No, you take it.

Erik Erikson wrote of generativity, "the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation". Generativity means "a belief in the species... a sense that the child is a welcome trust of the community." It appears that large numbers of parents have not achieved Erikson's generativity. Two Maurice Sendak books seem to illustrate what is happening.

Nearly 20 years ago, in Where the Wild Things Are, Max's mother - never pictured, but clearly doing her job - punishes Max for misbehavior. Remember, the night he wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind or another, his mother called him Wild Thing and he said I'll Eat You Up, so he was sent to his room without any supper. It is obvious that Max deserves the punishment and that the punishment fits the crime. Now, for most of the book, Max is clearly in the fantasy land of the wild things. But when his fantasy ends, he is back to reality, back to the place where he is most loved, and where his supper is waiting and it is still hot! What we learn about Max's mother is that she is there, that she cares enough about him to set appropriate limits and enforce appropriate punishment, and that she still loves him, feeds him, nurtures him.

In a 1983 Sendak book, Outside Over There, there is a different message. The book begins with Papa away at sea and Mama in the arbor and Ida, the child, holding a screaming baby. The mother looks too depressed to ever enforce a limit let alone prepare a hot meal! In this story, too, there is a great deal of frightening fantasy, and when we finally return to reality, Mama is still in the arbor, still wallowing in self-pity, still uninvolved with her children, still narcissistic. Ida is still carrying the

baby and Mama's back is turned away from her children. And Papa's letter asks that "my brave, bright little Ida must watch the baby and her mama for her papa who loves her always."

The love the father expresses is empty. In 1983, the parents are not caring for either the child or the baby. In 1983, the parents evidence no generativity, no guiding of the next generation. The 1983 Sendak book, unfortunately, mirrors the real world of many children today.